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AUTHOR Pfannkuche, Anthony; And Others
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ABSTRACT

The manual designed as a guide for trainers in a seminar for teachers concerning some of the central issues in contemporary foreign language teaching and learning presents notes on each of the five seminar sessions, including overall goals and goals for the prescribed session activity, time and procedural notes, and reading lists. (MSE)

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TRAINING TO TEACH A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Principles of Second Language Acquistion an Orientation for Foreign Language Teachers

NOTES FOR TRAINERS

Training Modules

A. Learning to Learn a Foreign Language

B. Training to Teach a Foreign Language

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Center for Applied Linguistics
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NOTES FOR TRAINERS

Part One: Language Learning and Language Acquisition

First Session: The First Language: How Children Learn to Speak

Goals: In this session the trainer will present an introduction to child language acquisition. The trainer will describe regular and systematic processes which underlie language acquisition, and present examples of the predictable order of acquisition of related structures of English. It is important in this session to clarify the meaning of the term "acquisition" in its technical sense, for this concept is critical to virtually every subsequent discussion. Participants may compare the critical survey of current research in Moskowitz with the still popularly-held behaviorist view of language learning.

Activity: Survey of Previous Language Learning Experience

Goals: This activity is designed to establish a context for the orientation program. The participants' past experiences with foreign language learning shape their expectations as students (or teachers). They bring a great deal to the orientation sessions, and this activity should demonstrate that what they contribute is relevant, in fact, crucial. The discussion should bring out a number of issues:

1) differences in learning styles among successful learners;
2) different perceptions about how an effective language class should be conducted;
3) identification of particular problems that are common to many learners, and some suggested solutions;
4) recognition of the distinction between formal and informal learning, that is, between "learning" and "acquisition".

Time: 15 - 20 minutes

Procedures: a) Participants should fill out questionnaires before coming to the first session. It should take about 30 minutes to complete the form. Participants will keep the form as part of their materials packet.

b) During the first session, the trainer will lead a discussion of the issues raised in the questionnaire. It is not necessary to deal with every question, nor to take the questions in order. Rather, the trainer should allow the concerns of the participants to emerge.

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Second Session: Is Second Language Learning Like the First?

Goals: The trainer introduces the distinction between language learning and language acquisition in this session. It is important for the participants to clearly distinguish these two learning principles, so the trainer will invite the participants to describe them in terms of their own experience. Discussion is vital at this point, and the trainer may find it more valuable to treat these issues anecdotally, or experientially, and down play the research base. The learning/acquisition dichotomy represents one of the main conceptual bases of this training program, so it must be established carefully.

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Part Two: The Language Learner and the World

Third Session: Affective Factors in Second Language Acquisition

Goals: The participants will receive an introduction to the range of affective factors that are thought to have an impact on language learning and language acquisition. Through the activity which introduces this session, the participants should begin to explore their own attitudes toward language learning, and toward the specific foreign language.

Activity: Thinking about Learning a Foreign Language (for FL teachers)

Goals: This activity, a survey of personal attitudes, and a discussion led by the trainer, is intended as an introduction to the question of affective variables in foreign language learning. The participants will explore their own attitudes toward a language they know well, and toward a language they would consider difficult.

Time: 15 minutes

Procedure:
1) Participants should complete the questionnaire before they come to the third session.
2) The trainer will lead a discussion of the issues addressed in the questionnaire as an introduction to the subject of this session: affective variables

Activity: Thinking about Learning a Foreign Language (for FL learners)

Goals: This activity is intended to help the students clarify their reasons for studying this foreign language. They will also explore their attitudes regarding the language, its speakers, and the instructional situation.

Time: 15 minutes

Procedure:
1) The trainer should introduce this form in the previous session. Blanks have been left in the form, and the trainer should go through the form with the students, as they fill in the blanks appropriately. (I have special reasons for choosing FRENCH .)

2) The participants should complete the form before they come to the third session.

3) The trainer will lead a discussion of the issues raised in the questionnaire as an introduction to "affective variables".

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Fourth Session: What Can We Learn from the Good Language Learner?

Goals: In this session, the trainer will present an overview of studies of the "good language learner". The trainer will survey research results, and then lead a discussion of participant perceptions of personal learning characteristics.

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Part Three: Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Teaching

Fifth Session (for FL teachers): Teachers Talk about Acquisition, Learning, and Language Teaching

Goals: The participants should discuss actual teaching situations in light of the previous training sessions. What are the implications for teachers of the learning/acquisition distinction? How does a teacher deal with affective variables, such as attitude and motivation?

This session is intended to have a practical focus, and it is structured around the demonstration of mechanical, meaningful, and communicative, or contextualized structure drills. In so far as possible, this session should be devoted to demonstration and problem-solving, within the framework of the language acquisition research which has been reviewed.

Activities: Discussion: Designing an Ideal Language Program
Demonstration: Three Types of Structure Drills

Part Three: Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Teaching

Fifth Session (for FL learners): Learning to Learn a Foreign Language

Goals: The participants should treat this session primarily as an opportunity to analyze their language learning situation. The central focus should be the classroom teacher's description of the particular characteristics of the language program they are now enrolled in. The participants should be encouraged to question and clarify the goals and techniques of the instructional program.

A second focus will be on personal learning strategies. An explanation of associational learning and vocabulary may be used as an example of individual language learning techniques. The emphasis should be on problem-solving: how can language study be made easier?

A third focus should be out-of-class language learning. The trainer may use this time to identify language resources available in the community.

Activities: Discussion: The Design, Teaching Methods and Goals of Your Foreign Language Class

Demonstration: Three Types of Structure Drills

Activity: Designing an Ideal Language Program (for FL learners)

Goal: The seminar participants are asked to describe their own approaches and preferences in learning a foreign language. Their responses should reflect their past experience in foreign language learning, and their pedagogical orientation. They will be asked to compare their "ideal program" to the program they are teaching in now. Are there ways of incorporating the "ideal" into their own language classes?

Time: 15-20 minutes

Procedure:
1) The participants should complete the form before they come to the fifth session.
2) The trainer leads a discussion of "ideal" language programs, and tries to identify common themes among the participants' approaches.
3) To conclude the discussion, the trainer poses the questions: "How would you compare your 'ideal program' to the program you are teaching in now?" "Can you build some 'ideal' elements into your own language classes?"

Activity: Demonstrate Three Types of Structure Exercises

Goal: In this activity the trainer gives a practical demonstration of the three types or levels of structure drills described by Paulston in "The Sequencing of Structural Pattern Drills." A clear distinction should be drawn between a purely mechanical drill and a meaningful one. Again, the meaningful exercise should be quite distinct from the communicative or contextualized exercise. The three exercises described here are intended as examples, and the trainer may want to develop a different approach. The primary objective is to illustrate the third type of exercise: structured classroom activity that involves natural communication.

Time: About 15 to 20 minutes

Procedure:

1) The trainer demonstrates the three types of exercises. (The trainer may wish to demonstrate only the third one, and briefly discuss the first two.)
   a) Mechanical Drill. Using individuals, small groups, and the whole "class", the trainer conducts a series of drills on simple, irregular past tense forms. Drills may include: a) repetition; b) question and answer, chain drills; c) substitution; d) transformation, and so on.
   b) Meaningful Drills. Using pictures, or demonstration, the trainer asks a series of questions about action which have just occurred.
   c) Communicative or contextualized drill. The trainer arranges for one of the participants to assist in this exercise. Out of hearing of the others, the trainer tells the participant to leave the room, then, while the other participants watch, to come into the room, do a number of random activities for about half a minute, and then leave again. Now, the trainer asks the participants to tell precisely what the person did, and in exactly what sequence. The trainer should encourage argument and debate about exactly what happened and what the sequence was.

Notes: 1) The trainer may want to vary the order of the exercises, and begin with the "communicative/contextualized exercise." Indeed, since the participants are likely to be fully familiar at least with mechanical and meaningful drills, this activity might usefully focus on the third type of drill, leaving the other two for discussion only.

2) Exercises

Exercise A. For the purpose of illustration, the trainer may conduct this drill in a language unfamiliar to the participants. The point of this sort of exercise is that one doesn't have to understand what's being said in order to successfully manipulate the drill. However, as a matter of good teaching practice, the trainer should take care to see that the meaning of what's being said is always clear.

Exercise B. Some of the same types of activities may be used in this exercise — question and answer drills, for example. But the trainer needs to make it clear that a participant has to understand what is being asked, in order to answer. Once again, the trainer may want to conduct this exercise in an unfamiliar language as well.

Exercise C. While the first two exercises focussed to a greater or lesser degree on form, the essence of this exercise is communication. (For this reason, it may be wise to begin with it, while the participants are not anticipating the formal focus.) The trainer must do whatever is necessary to keep the focus on meaning, rather than form. Participants should not be corrected, nor should they receive expressions of approval. The trainer should assume the role of someone simply trying to find out what happened, and when it happened.

3) The trainer conducts a discussion of the exercises, relating them to Paulston's article. The trainer should encourage the participants to analyze these exercises in the context of language learning vs. language acquisition.

4) It is important to remember that this activity is concerned with

illustrating a theoretical point, and it is not intended to advocate one or another teaching methodology. The trainer should encourage the participants to use this discussion as an opportunity to reflect on methods they are familiar with, ones which they support or ones which they feel are ineffective.

Activity: Discussion of the Design, Teaching Methods, and Goals of the Foreign Language Class

Goals: In this activity, the foreign language classroom teacher leads a discussion about the design and expectations of this foreign language class.

Time: 15-20 minutes

Procedure: 1) The classroom teacher makes a presentation of the overall goals of the language class for this term. The presentation should include a general description of what material (structures and vocabulary) will be covered during this class. The teacher should also describe performance expectations of the students in behavioral terms. The methods of student assessment should be described carefully, including the types of assessment instruments used, and the level of performance expected on them.

2) The classroom teacher describes and demonstrates (perhaps in conjunction with the other activity in this session) the instructional methods used in the course, and outlines why these methods are used and what they are expected to accomplish.

3) The classroom teacher leads a discussion about the goals and purposes of this approach to foreign language instruction.

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